

Retrieving “Civil Society”: Reclaiming “Villages” through “Civil Society Activism”/ Movement in Karnataka

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This article basically tries to understand how a civil society as movement, taking Karnataka as a case, is trying to construct or retrieve “village,” as the latter constitutes a site of Civil Society at a time when villages come under a series of threats both from within and outside, particularly during the time of globalization. At the same time, how civil society tries to construct its social categories as one that is rational, ‘argumentative’ and logical, rather than a “sack of potatoes,” “conservative,” tradition-bound and irrational / ignorant. All these are manifested in the discourse on “Village” – the latter is taken for a couple of reasons: that “villages constitutes the core of any civil society activism;” that village constitute the base for identity-formation for the social category including the larger civil society; that the village is “the site” of civil society, including the fact that civil society is embedded in the villages (it is here that stereotyped imaginations are negated) and finally, that it is through the networking of different civil societies that “local” at the global level can be retrieved. Interestingly, there are two kinds of civil societies that the movement is contemplating: one, the activism of movements as part of civil society, and two, “civilized society” of rational beings - which lies inside the realm of the village and is identified with it - which can be constructed through the means of Civil Society activism of movements.

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The arrival of civil society as a social movement¹ in the Indian context is generally traced to the decade of the 1980s when different social movements began to challenge the larger social/political framework.² In fact, the decade of the 1980s is called “rebirth,” “return,” “resurgence of civil society” (Chandoke, 1995; Arato, 1981; Kaldor, 2003).³ These civil society activisms are also conceptualized as New Social Movements (for example, Farmers, Dalit, Women, Ecology etc.) for the reason that they believe rather in identity politics (Assadi, 2003) than in “class politics”; they aim at retrieving democratic spaces for the marginalized or subalterns without resorting to “violence”; they represent those who are either ignored as exploited by traditional Marxism or “who are exploited in ways related to the new process of contemporary capitalism;” they believe in the diffusion of power rather than concentration; they are trying to throw up a new discourse both from within and from the global perspective, and finally, they believe in class collaboration and also in linking up with similar as well as distinct civil society movements both within the nation and outside it.

This article basically tries to understand how a civil society as movement, taking Karnataka as a case, is trying to construct or retrieve “village,” as the latter constitutes a site of Civil Society at a time when villages come under a series of threats both from within and outside, particularly during the time of globalization. At the same time, how civil society tries to construct its social categories as rational, “argumentative”⁴ and logical, rather than as a “sack of potatoes,”⁵ “conservative,” tradition bound and as irrational/ignorant. All these are manifested in the discourse on “Village” – the latter is taken up for a couple of reasons: “village constitutes the core of any civil society activism;” village constitutes the base for identity-formation for social categories including the larger civil society; village is “the site” of civil society just as civil society is embedded in the villages (it is here that stereotyped imaginations are negated); and

finally, it is through the networking of different civil societies that "local" at the global level can be retrieved. Interestingly, there are two kinds of civil societies that the movement is contemplating: one, activism of movement as part of civil society, and two, "civilized society" of rational beings — which lies inside the realm of village and is identified with it; however, it can be constructed through the means of Civil Society activism of movement.

Civil Society, Ideology and Retrieving Space

In Karnataka, civil society activism represented by farmers' movement under Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, although began in the 1980s, it located the movement back in history, particularly in 1965. This is but to state that the movement has a longer tradition than that of the Maharashtra⁶ or Tamil Nadu Movement⁷. Secondly, it was seen as part of a long process of construction of new civil society, "which must be driven by people at local level but reach global level and which cannot take place without the active and direct involvement of society as a whole". In fact, the farmers' movement under KRRS has conceptualized its movement as "Village Movement". This movement, however requires to be seen or analysed as part of the "New Farmers' Movement"⁸ (Brass, 1995).

To begin with, the movement viewed that the absence of "any vibrant civil society comprising of villages" is due to multiple reasons: the top-down approach of the State, particularly its nature of suppressing any autonomous voice of the villages, taking away its autonomy in deciding developmental activities, too much of urban/ industrial bias, closing down of any space for individual autonomy, etc. This kind of analysis went on during the 1980s. However, during the decade of the 1990s, a shift in the realization became apparent. This realization led to strengthening the local work on global issues, including global-networking with the aim of bringing together different forms of movements from the other parts of the world that were fighting against capitalism.

At the outset, KRRS ideology is a mixture of third world dependency theory, Lenin's theory of Imperialism, Lohiaism, Nehruvianism, and Gandhism, including Marxism. Despite all these ideological currents, KRRS adhered to and advocated Gandhism for the simple reason that Gandhism provided greater legitimacy. It calls itself a Gandhian socialist movement.⁹ In fact, even when the movement was split in 2002 into two, ideological issues were not the major concern, as much as the differences in the approach in addressing the larger issues. For example, it was said that one group led by late Prof. Nanjundaswamy was particularly concerned about the global issues or globalization afflicting the Indian villages or farmers; on the contrary, the other group was concerned about local issues. These kinds of splits and mergers were not new to the farmers' movement. In 1983, the first split took place when the farmers' movement was increasingly identified with market-oriented farmers including the rich farmers at the cost of poor, Dalits, etc. A split also came about on the issue of contesting the elections. However, these splits have had their effect on the movement; in due course it lost its tempo, its vigour and began to be seen or identified as a spent force. In fact, the idea of confronting globalization during the 1990s and 2000s transformed the movement into a larger movement against the globalization.

Village as a site of "Civil Society" is the basic unit in the ideology of the farmers' movement. It is stretched to understand the linkage with the nation and nationality. Village is seen as a reflection of the nation and nationality. There is an attempt to state that "India is another name for Villages or Bharat" (KRRS, 1980) - thus identifying the nation with the villages. In other words, the nation is constructed in terms of multiple "civil societies." At the same time, the movement saw the Village as a site of appropriation, of discrimination, and of uneven development. This is apparent when the movement raised the popular slogan, "We milch the cow but who drinks the milk? We

rear the chicken, but who eats the egg?" The symbolism of eggs and chickens was to show that the farmers are the actual producers, but that in the process they have become the losers. This is one of the reasons why the movement always argued that the "autonomy and freedom of the village should be based on the autonomy and freedom of its individual members".

Its major objective however, is to retrieve or construct a "New Civil Society" which is nothing but the construction of a New Village Republic. This civil society would be based on direct democracy, self-reliance and the participation of all the members of the community in decision-making, especially on the issues that affect them, and also on the "creation of mechanisms of representation that ensure that affairs affecting several communities are decided upon through processes of consultation involving all communities affected by the decisions." Further, it argues that the most important element in the "New Civil Society or New Village republic" is to create autonomous and free individual members. This can be done by way of removing different social practices which have come in the way of creating autonomous individuals: eliminating the caste system, patriarchy, religious intolerance, and different forms of oppression. Further, the construction of a satyagrahi becomes all the more important; Civil Society should be based on such satyagrahis who are non-violent, non-appropriators, who believe in truth and also in the autonomy of other individuals. Villages, in the final analysis, are the aggregation of satyagrahis.

Interestingly, the Civil Society or village republic that the movement advocated in the context of globalization was different from that of the Hindutva variety. KRRS is basically opposed to capitalist globalization, and at the same time, it stands for self-reliance. It thinks that the Gandhian concept of Swadeshi has been perverted and abused by the Hindu far-right "to boost the most stupid nationalism and intolerance with their xenophobic discourse on

Swadeshi.” It is here that the movement aims at reclaiming the internationalist roots of the Gandhian concept: KRRS, in fact, does not see Swadeshi as an objective to be achieved at the national level, but at the community level. This community is located in, and is a part of, the village republic. In the final analysis, economic self-management and the freedom of villages, thereby creating a New Civil Society, is the major component in its strategies as well as discourses. Nonetheless, one has to ask the question as to why the movement was concerned about constructing a new civil society in the context of globalization: the answer lies in the fact that global capital is now shrinking or closing down the spaces for the autonomous growth of villages, it is slowly and steadily taking away the different rights of the villages; it is making the villages “wither away” both as an actual as well as an imaginary entity. This is why it resorted to different strategies to reclaim the “Civility of Civil Society” represented by the villages. These strategies, however, are not confined to the locality alone, but are stretched to the global level too.

At the outset, the movement, as civil society activism, believed in using civil disobedience as well as the non-violent method of direct action, including the construction of local alternatives by the rural or local communities, which aims at bringing changes in social relations and also in dismantling capitalism from below. In fact, the non-violent method is based on the clear-cut understanding that “one can only speak about violence when it is directed against living beings, not against inanimate objects” (Assadi, 1998:212-227). This argument is borrowed from the Gandhian argument, who once argued that the destruction of non-living being is non-violence. Nonetheless, KRRS did not believe in the destruction of buildings all the time. This is apparent when it attacked Monsanto or Cargil or Kentucky Fried Chickens, etc. Many a times it did use other methods which are not used in Gandhian politics, e.g. “laughing away”- in this strategy the agitators would spend a whole day in front of the

government buildings delivering speeches about its policies and "laugh their heads off."

Contesting the Global through the Local

Globalization was contested for different reasons: one, it leads to the collapse of civil society embedded in the villages; two, it transforms the civil society into a non-descript category; and, it leads to the closing down of the spaces of democracy at the grass-root level. However, the most important reason is that it would lead to the genocide of the rural population. This is apparent in the following: "What do you do with 75% of the population who are in farming? Are your other sectors capable of absorbing them? Where do you send them? Well, of course you displace them; uproot them from their farms. Where do you send them? The other sectors are as rickety as you can imagine. And they cannot be absorbed in any other sector. So that's why I say globalization as formulated by the WTO, particularly the agreement on agriculture, will result in genocide in India"¹⁰

In fact, its critique of globalization begins with a critique of GATT agreements. Here, it tries to link the consequences of the GATT agreement both on agricultural as well as industrial sectors. Interestingly, the inclusion of agriculture in the Uruguay round or in GATT agreement was but an attempt to ensure the "survival of an otherwise collapsing capitalist system."¹¹ This is because agriculture is the only sector which does not face any recession, unlike the industrial sector. They were looking for a sector that would take care of the otherwise collapsing capitalist system. "That was food. So they are trying to gain control over world affairs by controlling the food sector": through the means of food and of patenting, the Western countries are controlling the every day life practices of the village communities. It is here that the KRRS saw the larger trap laid on India: GATT submits India to a neo-colonial relationship. India, it believed would not be subjected to be a colony of one power, but of

G-7 countries. It is nothing but “slaves under a collective colonial rule”. In this context, KRRS favoured a new path of development for countries like India, based on the model of “Khadi Curtain” (Assadi, 1994; Assadi, 1997); it is nothing but following the method of Iron Curtain that Russia adopted, or Bamboo Curtain that China adopted in order to compete at the global level.

However, one of the strategies to reclaim the Village Republics or Civil Society is through the symbolism of “Namdu”- Ours. On February 13, 2005, KRSS of the Nanjundaswamy group organized a mammoth rally in Mysore.¹² This particular rally is important for two reasons: it was in this rally that the movement came out with a novel method of selling village products under “Namdu” – “Ours” to counter global capitalism as well as to offer an alternative to capitalist goods. It was also a part of retrieving “Civil Society” embedded in the Village Republic thereby re-enacting the Gandhian notion in the post-colonial present.

Symbolically, “Namdu” was enacted through the method of selling tender coconut, coconut oil, milk products, rice, ragi, maize, different types of pulses, rice flour, ragi flour, maize flour, daily needs like pain balm, cold cream, detergent powder, soap, herbal shampoo, tooth paste, tooth powder, fruit jam, juice, biscuits, cookies, and kumkum prepared by women farmers in different villages all over Karnataka. In fact, once again, women were brought into the mainstream politics, however symbolically. This time village women symbolized the reassertion of village identity as well as the identity of farmers.

This rally came out with a declaration after launching the “Gram Swaraj Movement.” Incidentally, some of the issues that were raised in the declaration were as old as of the 1980s, particularly the issue of the recovery of loans or debts: in the latter case, the declaration stated, “All the loans are the result of government policies.” Secondly, the declaration also contained the issues related to preserving and

improving ground water through rain-water harvesting, establishing suitable markets for village products, and "safeguarding prices and government import policies that have led to the suicides and downfall of farmers"; particular concern was expressed regarding the milk producers, silk farmers and coconut growers.

However, the "self" of the village was sought to be retrieved through three important issues; here lies the "civility of civil society" too: one, checkmating any lease or transfer of any farm land, particularly "Bagar Hukum" (Squatted Land) to the foreign Multinationals; here the land is seen as a major identity issue;¹³ secondly, rejecting GM foods, through logical discourses including agitations, as they are pushing the farmers and bio-diversity to greater losses. Any loss is viewed as a larger attack on the "civil society" component of the villages; this loss leads, however, to such other losses as the "village self, loss of identity and loss of culture."

The second important way of retrieving the civil society embedded in the villages in the context of globalization is through the means of asserting the "right to feed oneself and food sovereignty" (Nanjundaswamy, 2003:31-33). In fact, ideologues argue that "right to food" is ridiculous as food is such a simple natural nutritional need of a living being. Food sovereignty is one of the major components in retrieving village identity/civil society. However, food sovereignty entails many things: sustainable care, and use of the natural resources, especially land, water and seeds by the village communities. Right to food is, at the present juncture, threatened by the global /neo liberal agenda. The latter is increasingly becoming the cause of the degradation of land, nature, and the "displacement of rural people and farmers." The present economic system, it is argued, "treats both nature and people as a means to an end with the sole aim of generating profits. The concentration of wealth and control in the hands of a small minority has created dramatic constraints on farmers throughout the world, pushing them to the brink of irredeemable extinction" (Nanjundaswamy, 2003).

These particular arguments call for a critique of the green revolution of yesteryears by looking at an alternative that the KRRS would pose. KRRS would dismiss the argument that the green revolution really brought self-sufficiency in food production. It rather finds the answer in the policy of the abolition of Zamindary.¹⁴ "Whatever India is claiming as food self-reliance came after it became free. Food shortage, before freedom, was mainly because of the colonialist demand for crops that were necessary to supply raw materials to the industries which used land for non-food crops. And after freedom, land policy changed mainly because of the abolition of zamindary (feudal land ownership) and the introduction of land reforms. That was the main reason for the food self-reliance of India - not the so-called miracle seeds introduced by the green revolution technology. May be it contributed a little, but that was not the major reason. So now we know that the first green revolution technology has become stagnant and has failed. That makes us look for alternatives, an alternative, which is fundamentally different from the first green revolution technology - a technology which will not repeat the same things which have resulted in the stagnation in production. Production in most of the cases has been coming down for the past 5 or 6 years. A kind of technology which will not damage soil fertility, which will not increase plant diseases, which will not damage biodiversity or introduce monocultures. This can be an alternative." It is through this alternative that the KRRS tries to retrieve the larger village Civil Society.

The third way to retrieve the Civil Society of the Village is to oppose patenting. Patenting brings in new risks into the food system. It helps the corporate capitalist to control the every day life-practices of the rural villages, by appropriating bio-diversity to its advantage. Opposing it is also a part of retaining the food sovereignty of the rural areas, including the Nation. It argues that "when they start controlling the seed, they control the farmer. And gradually they

control the foodgrain trade. And once multinational companies control foodgrain trade it means they control the nation." The nation is replicated in the villages. KRRS challenged the patenting of the exclusive use of pesticide extracts from Neem seeds by a Multinational Chemical Corporation, W. R. Grace Company; it challenged the US Patent and Trade Mark office in the US. This is where its challenge not only covers the boundaries of Civil Society activism but also the legal framework of a nation-state. In fact, more than 200 organizations also joined in opposing the Patent Right to the Company. This opposition is seen and viewed as 'the battle between native peoples and multinationals.' The argument about and of the village comes through three ways of mediation: "First, it is obvious that indigenous village traditions would not be recorded in formal publications. To expect Indian villagers to formally publish centuries-old learned traditions are unrealistic and unfair. The accumulated knowledge is the result of many anonymous and individual efforts carried out over hundreds of years; secondly, neem represents and carries cultural symbolism as well as religious beliefs; thirdly, all human beings, particularly the villagers have rights to collectively created property." This is why the identity of village or the civil society was sought to be retrieved through opposing the patenting of Neem Plants.

If these are the critiques to reclaim the civil society embedded in the villages, however there are also other methods adopted vis-à-vis globalization:

- In 1992, KRRS's opposition to global capital was first expressed in the form of ransacking the Cargil office in Bangalore and its administrative building in Bellary. It was part of an opposition to the provisions of IPR in the GATT agreement. The major argument was that the West is monopolizing the third world through the appropriation of germplasms of the third world experiment.¹⁵
- Secondly, On January 26th 1996, KRRS attacked Kentucky

Fried Chicken's outlet in Bangalore. The attack had all the Gandhian character: "Customers were politely asked to leave the place, the cashier was told to collect his money and lock the safe before the ransacking of the store began."¹⁶

- In 1998, it started "Cremate Monsanto" against the Monsanto terminator seed, in Bellary district (Deccan Herald, 1998).¹⁷ This was carried out in 1998 for the first time. In fact, Cremate Monsanto campaign initially burned two of the three trial fields of Bt. Cotton, but in the case of the third one they could not succeed in persuading the farmer.¹⁸ It was done in Malladagudda in Raichur district. The Bt cotton that Monsanto was introducing was conceptualized as "a new imperialist assault" on the Third World. Here the argument of the village was mediated through the community - for example, "experiment on cotton variety would risk the viability of not only his farm, but of his entire village community."

In fact, KRRS wanted a five years' 'moratorium' for commercial operations of any genetically-modified (GM) seeds in India. KRRS was designing the struggle so as to enact similar struggles in other parts of the world.¹⁹ "...We are giving an international call for direct action against Monsanto and the rest of the biotech gang. This call for action will hopefully inspire all the people who are already doing a brilliant work against biotech, and many others who so far have not been very active on the issue, to join hands in a quick, effective worldwide effort." Here too its actions were treated as non-violent in nature (St.Louis Business Journal, 2003). In fact, in 2001, it planned to "Burn UNDP 2001 Report" on the lines similar to "Cremate Monsanto", as the 2001 report was a biased one. The major concern was mediated through a critique of the UN, principally how UN has become a stooge in the hands of MNCs (The Hindu, 2001) and in propagating the use of GM food as solution to the problems of developing countries. The strategy of destroying BT cotton

continued even in subsequent years. In 2002, KRRS destroyed BT Cotton in Rudranakatte in Davanagere (Infoshop News, 2002). In 2003 KRRS, along with more than 40 farmers, ransacked the corporation's former Bangalore facility or the Green House of Monsanto and demanded its withdrawal from India.²⁰ While attacking Monsanto the apparent argument was that it was conducting the experiments without disclosing the "terminator seed," its seeds were environmentally hazardous "and could contaminate the genes of native varieties of cotton, which would impoverish the farmers"²¹ (Reuters, 1998). This attack was timed when the WTO meeting was on in Cancun, Mexico: it was meant to draw the attention of those attending the World Trade Organization meeting in Cancun, Mexico.

In 1998, KRRS initiated "Beeja Satyagraha." This was a part of opposing the Dunkel Draft as well as asserting the farmers' right to produce, improve, sell or exchange seeds as against the MNCs. KRRS made it clear that its main agenda was to drive out the multinationals since "our genetic resources are our national property". Herein it once again enacted the yesteryears' "Quit India" strategy as well as Satyagraha for the larger purpose of retrieving the Civil Society of the villages.

In the same year, in November 1999, KRRS held a convention (Multinational Monitor, 1996) to protest the invasion of the multinationals and the Westernization of local agriculture. This protest coincided with the protest against the Third Ministerial Conference of WTO. Most important is the fact that the rally, in the final analysis, served a notice to IISc; which was then housing Monsanto, that, IISc was created at the time of freedom movement to help the development of country with regard to science and technology. Instead of fulfilling your objectives, you have given space to the multinational corporation Monsanto, which is trying to build up a monopoly on agriculture with the help of biotechnology. You

will have to withdraw the permission given to Monsanto to do research work in your campus (Multinational Monitor, 1996).

However, this rally was joined and supported by activists from several leftist organizations and unions. At the end of the demonstration, they issued a 'Quit India' notice to Monsanto, urging the company to leave the country or face non-violent direct action against its activities.

If these are some of the Civil Society activisms that KRRS carried out on its own during the decade when globalization was destroying the village identities and thereby the civil society at the grassroot level, there are also struggles, which were carried out in collaboration with other larger collectives. In fact, KRRS is a part of larger collectives, both local as well as International. Locally, KRRS is part of The Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers' Movements, a coalition of farmer unions. In its formative years, the movement was part of an inter-state coordination committee, and later on it became a part of ICC. On March 21, 2001, it staged a massive rally of more than one million in Kisan Ghat at Delhi. They even threatened a nation-wide Satyagraha, direct action and a programme for a parallel government. Interestingly, in this rally KRRS made a passionate appeal to the President of India to take the "agricultural sector" out of WTO so that "agricultural trade can continue as was the position before 1994." Most interesting are the alternatives that KRRS proposed: "If this is not possible, then India, along with big groups of developing and poor nations, can trade among themselves and this will benefit farmers, labour and the poor of the Third World countries" (The Tribune, 2001).

On April 2003, KRRS organized World Farmers' Day at Dharwad in Karnataka when Bangalore was witnessing IT Mela.²² The major concern of the convention was to oppose the introduction of BT cotton and other genetically modified crops as they "spell danger to agriculture."²³ Further, it was argued that BT would deny the farmers

their right to opt for not only suitable crops but also the cultivation method. In the process, the identity of the farmers, including village communities as a site of civil society, would be lost. The village communities would be dependent on MNCs for everything, from purchasing seeds to marketing their produce; it is nothing but losing the larger identities of farmers as well as the civil society of villages.

On October 2, 2005, The Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers Movements led a massive rally in Maharashtra. Here the major issue was opposition to increased dumping of cheap subsidized agricultural goods. At the same time, it viewed how dumping had dislocated a large number of rural population and had led to a sharpening of rural crisis. This had manifested itself in a series of farmers committing suicide. This is apparent in the following: since 1995, when India joined the WTO, there has been a surge in imports of agricultural commodities, which are being dumped by developed countries in the international market below their cost of production. This has led to a deep decline in domestic agriculture prices and has deepened the agrarian crisis in rural India. The bulk of agricultural imports constitute mainly edible oils and pulses (chickpeas, pigeon peas, lentils, dry peas etc.). Other major items imported on a regular basis include dairy products, raw cashew nuts, fruits and raw cotton.

KRRS is closely associated itself with other social movements in opposing globalization. For example, even though KRRS is not a member of the NAPM, it joined hands with the latter in opposing globalization. In 2005, it joined a long list of social movements in writing letters to Members of Parliament in demanding a standstill on the GATT agreements.²⁴ One of the major concerns was about the opening up of the service sector without adequate assessment and its impact "on national employment, livelihoods, equity and welfare which is likely to result in far reaching negative impact on a broad cross-section of people, particularly those in the low-income brackets and those situated in the rural areas."²⁵ Rural areas become

one of the major components in its opposition although there are other issues raised: one, immediate halt to negotiations on services-liberalization under GATT; two, opposition to all proposals for "benchmarking" or "complementary approaches" to services-liberalization; three, making binding commitments under FDI which seriously undermine the ability of governments to regulate foreign investment in the services sector; four, the gains that India hopes to get from liberalization through temporary movement of labour is relatively less. Since it basically helps one sector rather than the other sectors etc., this will worsen brain drain once again; and finally, the appointment of an inter-sectoral team by the Indian Parliament to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the impact of past liberalization and privatization of services.

However, there are times when the Civil Society activism of KRRS also differed from other social movements from while trying to retrieve locality. Their major difference with Vandana Shiva is one of the best examples. The other good example in recent years is when KRRS organized the Mumbai Resistance, against the 4th World Social Forum. Interestingly, KRRS did not join the World Social Forum in opposing globalization; earlier too it had not joined Asian Social Forum because "ASF is being launched by NGOs little known by the people of India". However, it joined Mumbai Resistance in 2004.²⁶ Mumbai Resistance was an attempt to provide a separate space for global peasantry, independent of WSE.²⁷ In fact, the KRRS and others decided to create a Global Peasant Forum outside World Social Forum-2004. During Mumbai Resistance, it called its struggle a "true resistance to imperialist globalization and war". Its major slogan, unlike that of the WSE, was "there is no other option but to quit WTO".

Caravan as Theatrical Enactment to Retrieve the Local

The second important way of contesting globalization and thereby reclaiming the Civil Society embedded in the villages is by means of joining hands with other civil society groups at different parts of the

world. One of the best strategies that was adopted was to undertake "Intercontinental Caravan" (ICC) of Europe in 1999. This Caravan was equated with "War" (Dev, 1999). KRRS became a part of the larger "Caravan" that went on to demonstrate before the World Trade Organization (WTO) headquarters in Geneva, the European Commission in Brussels and the Organization of Economically Developed Countries (OECD) in Paris, Cologne, Germany, when the G-8 summit was underway. This caravan was supported by many organizations in Europe such as the French Peasant Confederation, the Dutch Agricultural Association, EuroDusnie in Leiden, Leoncavallo in Milan, the Reithalle in Berne and women's organizations like Espace Femmes International. Nonetheless, the argument about the village is apparent in the following: "One reason we are going to Europe is because we wish to expose organizations in the North that claim to speak on behalf of the poor of the South just because we are not around to make our views felt."

Caravan also contained the argument in favour of constructing a new world, and also in favour of the future for local people. Here, local should be understood in terms of large masses of rural people/ areas. This is apparent in the following:

We have come here to build bridges between people who want to reclaim their future, to disobey the institutions that run the current, self-destructive system of global economic, political and military governance, and to take their own power in their hands in order to construct a different world. A world where local people are in control of their local economy, where centralized political and economic powers disappear, where economic growth and increased consumption give way to quality of life and equality as social goals, where militarism and aggression become bad memories of the past (Assadi, 2001).

At the same time Caravan also carried an agenda of rejecting the Western paradigm of development imposed from above:

We do not want Western money, technologies or 'experts' to impose their development model on us. We also refuse to be used as political tools to ask the elites for reforms that we never demanded. We only want to organize our strength and combine it with the strength of other movements in the North and the South in order to regain control over our lives. We are not working for a place on the global table of negotiations, nor for a bloody revolution; we are just working on the long-term process of construction of a different world, a world which will come about from the local to the global, from a shift in the values and everyday choices of millions of persons (Dev, 1999).

Thirdly, its attempt to retrieve the Civil Society/villages is apparent when it joined Sienna Declaration (The Sienna Declaration, 1998) in opposing Corporate Globalization.²⁸ In this Sienna Declaration, KRRS, as participant, stressed a couple of things: globalization in its recent form even had a birth place and birth date i.e. Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, 1944; economic globalization, in its present form, is a deliberate attempt designed by economists, bankers, and corporate leaders to institute control; rules of globalization have been created and enforced by Multilateral Institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Maastricht Agreement, the World Bank and other global bureaucracies; economic globalization is creating the volatility in global financial markets and great vulnerability for all nations and people; this volatility has great consequences on the nations and communities, and is dislocating people from their regions or locality through an assault on "environmental and labor conditions, loss of wilderness and biodiversity, massive population shifts, increased ethnic and racial tensions, and other disastrous results". It is in this context that the Sienna Declaration included the following measures to overcome the crisis:

- Recognizing and acknowledging the fact that the current model is absolutely flawed;
- "Convening of a new Bretton Woods-type international conference which would bring to the table not only representatives of nation-states, bankers and industry, but an equal number of citizen-organizations from every country to design economic models that turn away from globalization and move towards localization, re-empower communities and nation-states, place human, social and ecological values above economic values (and corporate profit), encourage national self sufficiency (wherever possible) including 'import substitution,' and operate in a fully democratic and transparent manner."
- Encouraging all activity that reverses present policies that expand the freedoms of finance capital and transnational corporations, while suppressing the freedoms of individuals, communities, and nation-states to act on their own behalf.

In this declaration the second and the third issues are most important. This is because of the fact that it would demand re-empowering the civil society represented by village communities vis-à-vis global capital and it places them on par with different nations. Freedom of nations is viewed as equivalent to the freedom of communities. In other words, the loss of freedom of the communities is equated with the loss of freedom of the nation-state.

Another important way is of joining hands with the global civil society. One important civil society is Via Campensina. It is an international movement which coordinates different worldwide networks of small and landless peasants' movements, indigenous groups, women, small and middle scale producers, etc. In 2000, KRRS and Via Campensina organized a four day international conference in Karnataka, focusing mainly on agrarian issues (Scones, 2003:32). In 2000, it joined hands with a civil society called RFSTE

and organized the "Seed Tribunal" (incidentally, the Nanjundaswamy group did not join this Tribunal). The major issue in this tribunal was to collect the testimony of those village farmers who have been affected by globalization; it particularly focused on the number of suicides over the past couple of years. The shift in the agricultural practices was seen and viewed as part of the ongoing changes brought in through globalization. Herein the civil society of the village was reconstructed in terms of life before globalization, cultural practices prior to the marketization of rural economy, and identities prior to suicide.

KRRS is also a part of PGA, People's Global Action, which was created in 1998 by a variety of social movements both from the North and the South; People's Global Action against "Free" Trade (PGA) movement, which unites movements on five continents (including the Zapatistas of southern Mexico and the Landless Peasants' Movement (MST) of Brazil). The PGA's "hallmarks" are a clear rejection of the WTO and similar institutions and agreements, a confrontational attitude, a call to non-violent disobedience, and decentralization and autonomy as organizing principles. PGA also added a fifth hallmark at its meeting in Bangalore which "rejects all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds" (Alternative Press Review, 2000). In this, the PGA argument of retrieving the civil society entrenched within the collective life of communities is apparent when it argues that it stands on the premise of taking back "collective and democratic control over our resources and forms of life, to rebuild our autonomy and self-organisation." There is a shared vision among those who participate in PGA: that the emancipation of any one social category in the present context is connected to the emancipation of all the oppressed in the world: this is the reason why the larger collective of social movements was stressed; the second important shared vision

is the fact that they believed in building "locally controlled and genuinely democratic and participatory social and economic relations as alternatives to capitalism." Here, they reject the vanguard of any party as it would translate into abuses of power and the subsequent collapse of the dream. This is the reason why they demand local autonomy combined with international solidarity, along with globally coordinated action. However, there are five basic principles on which PGA relies:

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalization;²⁹
2. Rejection of all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds;
3. A confrontational attitude; this is because lobbying has little impact in a situation wherein the transnational capital is the real policy-maker;
4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism; and
5. An organizational philosophy based on decentralization and autonomy.

Civil Society activism of KRRS extended its participation to Global Days of Action against Capitalism during summit meetings of global bodies such as WTO, the G8, the IMF/WB, etc. and during different intervals. In May 1998, it co-organized a massive rally of about two lakh people in Hyderabad along with other social movements, which ultimately provided ground for the creation of Joint Action Forum of Indian People against the WTO and Anti-People Policies, JAFIP. It also organized the Second Conference of PGA in Karnataka in 1999.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one can ask the question as to whether globalization has closed down the spaces for village identities as the site of civil society. Or is it the larger threat that made the movements such as the one in Karnataka to enact and use Gandhian idioms, symbolism, and strategies to contest globalization? Most important is, which civil society was the Movement representing? Have these contestations any bearing on the socially marginalized categories, particularly the rural poor?

In fact, the Civil Society activism represented in the form of movement was concerned about the civil societies/villages that come under the arena of green revolution, rather than those which are not directly connected to globalization. It is absolutely silent about the unchanging villages such as the ones in the National parks or the tribal villages; probably they are seen more in terms of "non-civility." This is the reason why there is no linkage between the struggles that the tribals' villages carry on and the struggle that KRRS undertakes. Herein, the locality is constructed by taking the villages of green revolution or those which are connected to the larger market and are treated as sites of civil society, as they represent the spaces for democracy, freedom, rationality, reason and logical discourses. While constructing the locality, there is some built-in amnesia: about the differences among the rural social categories; about social power and its use vis-à-vis the socially marginalized categories; about social conflict and about differences within the locality. In the final analysis, it too falls within the stereotyped understanding of villages: that all villages or civil societies are alike, that they are equally and in similar fashion linked to globalization and are equally exploited; that they would be withering away once globalization takes roots firmly in the countryside or traps rural categories in the larger agenda of globalization. However, what makes the farmers' movement unique is the fact that for the first time it is taking up the issues of villages as

"civil society sites" and taking them to debate at the global level. Here it takes up two forms of civil society: its activism as part of civil society and villages as sites of civil society. Both are inter-related; any rupture would have the consequence or bearings on the other: it would affect the locality, the identities, the cultural practices, the autonomy, and finally, the nation itself. In this, it mimics Gandhian politics and idioms. But, in the final analysis, it is trying to create a space for the New Civil Society represented by the Indian villages in the global dialogues, discourses and negotiations, thereby attempting to rework global politics. In this politics, a thrust towards dismissing stereotyped images is apparent; the desire for expanding and strengthening democratic spaces is evident; the notion of collective identity is discernible, and finally, an urge to open up new discourses/new perspectives is obvious.

Notes

1. Mamdani, for example, would reduce the civil society to "popular movement". See Mamdani, 1992.
2. I have elsewhere argued that Civil Society activism needs to be located in the Nationalist or anti-colonial struggle of India rather than merely in the post-colonial present, see Assadi, 2005.
3. In fact Mary Kaldor, one of the chief exponents, argues in her article that the civil society was responsible in bringing about the regime change in the European continent during the 1980s/1990s.
4. This argument, I have borrowed from the title of Amartya Sen's book, *Argumentative Indian*, Penguin, 2006.
5. This is the notion typical of Marx.
6. In Maharastra, the Movement began under Shetkari Sanghathana during the 1980s. Sharad Joshi who coined the popular slogan "India Versus Bharat" led the movement.
7. In Tamil Nadu, in fact, Tamiliga Vyavasaigal Sangam was very popular and powerful during the 1970s.
8. There has been a serious debate about conceptualizing the farmers' movement as "New" in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (1995). Staffan Lendberg, Gail Omvedt and Tom Brass agreed to "New"ness. On the contrary, Sucha Singh Gill and I took an opposite view.

9. Prof. Nanjundaswamy provided the required leadership, he was often called anti-MNC activist; opportunist, rabble-rouser. However, its traditional issues were: debts, taxes, subsidies inputs and procurement prices. News from KRRS, Issue No. 1, November 1999.
10. <http://www.altragricoltura.org/krrs/news/default.htm>
11. On the contrary, the ideologue of KRRS attributed the collapse of the Soviet Union to the "economic policies it pursued. Russia neglected its food security and became dependent on food imports. That is the single major reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union, apart from doctrinal defects. Countries like India will face a similar fate when the new GATT regime comes into force".
12. Mahendra Singh Tikait of Bharatiya Kisan Union, Yudhhvir Singh, one of the conveners of National Farmers' movement, Dr.Devinder Sharma, a food and trade policy analysist and Sergio Oceransky anti-capitalist campaigner from Spain were the others who attended the rally. Tikait advocated Nanjundaswamy's strategies of peaceful methods against the global capitalist, including alternative life-styles for farmers. Yudhhvir Singh, however, was very critical of the import policy of the central government. Chukki Nanjundaswamy expressed a similar sentiment.
13. There are other two issues: To contact prompt private insurance companies to decide the premium depending on the average yield of a crop by considering each village or hamlet as a single unit in order to safeguard the peasant communities which have come under the whirlwind of these tragedies. And to resolve the inter-state differences of water among the farmers, it was decided to conduct discussions/organize convention with delegates from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Kerala and Karnataka.
14. <http://www.all4all.org/2004/03/665.shtml>
15. *Agricultural News*, January 7, 1993.
16. Interestingly, one can ask the question why KFC was targeted. D.R.Nagaraj, a prominent Kannada critic, would view in this attack "a mystical experience derived from everyday objects. Junk foods, toilet items, clothes, music, condoms, credit card." These mystical objects kill the familiarity of every day objects, including the fact that the traditional technology has no place in the mystical objects of globalization.

17. Here, the argument of the village is mediated through the community.
18. One of the farmers who opposed the destruction of field-trial was Shankarikoppa; he was once a member of KRRS. He called the arguments of KRRS a cheap publicity. Interestingly, Sharad Joshi favoured BT. Cotton. Sharad Joshi, the leader of the Shetkari Sanghathana (a farmers' organization based in Maharashtra) pledged that farmers would burn with their crops before they would allow the government to burn them. This particular statement was made before Nilakanteshwara temple on the banks of the Narmada. This mixture of religious symbolism with satyagraha is important. However, Joshi concluded his argument that, "by depriving the farmers of their freedom to choose the seed, the Governments in Gandhinagar and New Delhi are indulging in terrorism".
19. www.lobbywatch.org.
20. However Monsanto argued that its experiments in genetically modified farming have been successful in the US, China and other countries. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3099938.shtml
21. In fact, Monsanto was allowed to conduct experiments involving the terminator gene seeds at 40 centers in five Indian states.
22. This convention was attended by Mahendra Singh Tikait of UP, and Selva Muthu of Tamil Nadu.
23. India officially welcomed the much controversial GM crops on March 26, 2002 when the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) cleared BT. cotton for commercial cultivation in the country.
24. Some of them are Adivasi Jangal Janjeevan Andolan, Dadra & Nagar Haveli; Akshara- Women's Resource Centre, Mumbai; All Assam Krishak Mukti Sangram Samitee; All India Bank Officers Association (AIBOA); All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA); All India LIC Employees Federation; All India Port and Dock Workers Federation (Workers), Maharashtra; Bharat Krishak Samaj, Maharashtra State; Central Government Employees Coordination Committee; Capital Foundation Society, New Delhi Centre for Education and Communication; Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU); Combat Law Magazine; Corporate Accountability Desk of The Other Media, Chennai; Delhi Science Forum DET, India; EQUATIONS, Bangalore; Environment Support Group, Bangalore; Assam Forum for Indigenous Perspectives and Action, Manipur, etc.

25. <http://www.focusweb.org/india/content/view/761/29/>
26. The initiators of MR include the following: International League for Peoples' Struggles (ILPS); World Peoples' Resistance Movement (WPRM), South Asia; Anti-Imperialist Camp (Austria); Bayan (Philippines); Confederation of Turkish Workers in Europe (ATIK); Militant Movement (Greece); All India Peoples Resistance Forum (AIPRF) Secular Democratic Forum, AP; Bahujan Mukti Mahasangh; Bharat Jan Andolan (BJA); Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Haryana; Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM); Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS); Kashtakari Yuvak Sanghatana; Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana; MY India - Muslim Youth of India; Movement for Implementation of Land Reforms, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh; Samajik Nyaya Morcha; Struggling Forum for People's Resistance (SFPR), Telengana Jana Sabha; Yuva Bharat; Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Uttar Pradesh; Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Rajasthan; Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Himachal Pradesh; Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Madhya Pradesh; Farmers' Relief Forum, Kerala; Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association, Tamil Nadu; Nandyal Farmers' Association, Andhra Pradesh.
27. The others who joined the MR were BKU (UP), BKU (Rajasthan), BKU (Himachal Pradesh), BKU (MP), BKU (Lokhowal) Punjab, Farmer's Relief Forum, Kerala, Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association, Nandyal Farmers' Association, A.P.
28. Signatories include Maude Barlow, Council of Canadians, Ottawa, Canada, John Cavanaugh, Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C., U.S., Tony Clarke, Polaris Institute, Ottawa, Canada, Edward Goldsmith, The Ecologist, London, U.K., Martin Khor, Third World Network, Penang, Malaysia, Andrew Kimbrell, International Center for Technology Assessment, Washington, D.C., U.S., Jerry Mander, Public Media Center, San Francisco, CA, U.S., Helena Norberg-Hodge, International Society for Ecology and Culture, Dartington Totnes, U.K., Mark Ritchie, Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy, Minneapolis, MN, U.S., Vandana Shiva, Research Foundation for Science, Technology & Natural Resource Policy, New Delhi, India, Lori Wallach, Public Citizen, Washington, D.C., U.S., including Nanjundaswamy.

29. PGA argues that "Global capitalism is causing more exploitation, oppression, destitution and war in our times than ever before. The governments, multinational corporations and financial interests that rule over the global economy continue concentrating wealth and power. They fasten their control over our lives and resources, on multilateral institutions and agreements, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and regional trade agreements like the EU, FTAA, APEC, etc. These entities ensure that injustice and destruction expand all over the world, increasing the pain and despair of all oppressed and discriminated people, such as peasants, indigenous peoples, women, workers, the unemployed, slum dwellers, ethnic or religious minorities, Dalits and other exploited castes, Hijras, etc. The monstrous global inequalities have reached an absurd level where almost 1 billion people suffer chronic hunger and more than 1 billion lack access to safe drinking water, while the 3 richest men own more wealth than the poorest 48 countries, and 285 individuals possess as much as half of the humanity."

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